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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0193
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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0100
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RUEHKL/AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR 0007
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE 0004
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0043
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RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0098
RUEHJS/AMCONSUL SURABAYA 0198

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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: EAST JAVA MUDFLOW UPDATE: FLAMMABLE GAS BUILDUP CAUSES
ILLNESS, POTENTIAL FOR EXPLOSION THREATENS HOMES

REF: SURABAYA 40 (and previous)

This message is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

1. (U) Summary. Five residents of a village near the Sidoarjo mudflow fell unconscious after exposure to high concentrations of gas in their neighborhood. Sidoarjo Mud Management Agency (BPLS) spokesperson Ahmad Zulkarnain confirmed to the local press that a buildup of methane and hydrogen sulfide gas inside West Siring's sewers was the culprit. BPLS has installed pipes to vent the gas and prevent further buildup. A Sidoarjo city official has asked the central government to fund evacuation of these villages. This episode is the latest indicator that side effects of the mudflow disaster -- continued subsidence, geysers and flammable gases -- could increasingly plague local communities previously undamaged by the mudflow. End Summary

2. (U) On April 10, five residents of West Siring village fell unconscious and dozens more suffered from headaches, coughs, and nausea, reportedly from gas leaks. A BPLS team launched an investigation to identify the source of the gas. The 400 meter sewer running the length of the Siring-Porong Road has reportedly been venting flammable gas since the second week of April, according to local media. (Note: Sewers in many Indonesian cities are concrete-lined channels covered with moveable concrete slabs to allow access for cleaning). BPLS detected both methane and hydrogen sulfide gas from two gas sources near the sewer. According to the BPLS Gas Monitoring Team (PT Fergaco), the concentration of gas had reached 100% due to its confinement in the enclosed sewer. BPLS spokesman Zulkarnain advised residents not to throw lighted cigarettes or matches into the sewer.

3. (U) Residents initially prevented the BPLS team from venting the gas from the sewer along the Siring-Porong Street for fear the gas would be more dangerous once released. After a full day of resistance by villagers, BPLS was finally permitted to open the sewers on April 11. That same day, Saiful Illah, the Deputy Regent of Sidoarjo, and Ario Wijanarko, a Parliamentarian representing the National Awakening Party, visited the site and asked the central government to fund evacuation of West Siring's residents since the Sidoarjo government did not have an adequate

budget for this purpose.

14. (SBU) BPLS Operations Engineer Mr. Handoko Teguh told Congen Surabaya that gas emerging from beneath a single factory (PT. Alam Jaya) was the source of high gas concentrations in the sewer. BPLS had previously installed a pipe at the factory to deal with a geyser that had erupted there. As a result, gas mixed with the piped waste-water is likely the source of the gas build-up as the pipe empties into the West Siring sewer. Handoko added that these concentrations of gas are highly flammable. BPLS has removed portions of the sewer's concrete slab coverings and installed vertical pipes to vent the gas above ground level. Gas concentrations in the 400 meters of affected sewer have been reduced, but remain dangerous to local residents. Other evidence of the continually changing conditions under West Siring village emerged in early April when several residents complained that the floors of their homes were so warm they had to continually cool them with water, according to local media.

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